/52 cont./

eyes, speak to him, and hear him." But the Indians, while they do have these beliefs, have great fear of disembodied spirits or orodán, and, rather than invoking them, they try to get them out of their minds; they customarily abandon the places they have lived in and destroy the tools of their dead, avoid giving the same name to their children, avoid formulas that may recall the dead person to mind, and even show displeasure when they find themselves obliged to have to say the name of the dead ones. I often noticed this reluctance when inquiring for a name in order to make notes or records and heard older persons urge the younger ones, saying to them: "Tell him, nothing will happen to you; it is the Father who is asking it of you."

So that the invocation of the dead is only practiced by the piaches, and even this only rarely: it is heard in some stories and it is said of piaches of old.

112. As for omens, not all natural events or occurrences are interpreted as presages, but only a few are traditionally admitted as such. We thus have among others:

a) A spider that hangs down from the ceiling is a warning that some traveler will arrive that day to hang his hammock in our house.

b) The cry of roosters at an unaccustomed hour is a warning that they /others/ are speaking ill of us.

c) A peculiar humming in the ears is the voice of the dead who are calling us and to this they customarily answer "ete-pai pra /53/ edai" (I don't want to go), moving the hand at the same time near the ear like one who is waving away flies.

d) An unusual commotion from the hens, paujies, or hen turkeys, that run around as if they were crazy is a sign of the imminent arrival of persons who are beloved by us.

e) The song of the bird called pikâ is generally a bad omen, announcing deaths, just as we are accustomed to say about the bittern; sometimes a different song of the same bird is interpreted as a good omen for hunters.

Burial.

764 Burial customs are usually very revealing regarding religious beliefs and while those of the Kamarakotos, to the extent that I know them, are less so [128] than usual, they are best mentioned here. Since we were fortunate in that none [124] of the Indians died during our stay, my acquaintance is based on examination of graves[176] and statements of the Indians, checked and weighed as to their [178] reliability. Here the "progressive" policy of a few leaders is having a definite effect and it is necessary carefully to distinguish old custom from present tendencies.

766 A to?-esa? (head of a household group) is still often buried in his house and probably was invariably so interred in former times. Thus the former owner is buried in the abandoned dwelling at Uruyén and I have indicated his grave on the plan (Fig. 6A). This grave is built up with sticks and mud so that it projects about 50 cm. above the ground and must extend about an equal depth below the surface. The exposed superstructure is rectangular and about one meter square in plan. The body inside is said to be in a crouching position on its haunches, which is concordant with the otherwise peculiar form of the grave. [268] No one but the to?-esa? is buried in a house and since the house is always abandoned when its master dies anyway, no one lives in a house containing a grave. [269] There is, however, no apparent fear of this grave (or any other) or of the house, which is freely entered if occasion arises.

764 Persons other than a to?-esa? were not buried in houses but in the open nearby, each inhabited place usually having a patch of sabana that serves as a cemetery, although nothing but the presence of the graves distinguishes it. Everyone was formerly buried in a crouching position, but not in urns or baskets. [178] Now burial in the supine position is common, but this reflects the "progressive" influence. Only one body was, or is, placed in each grave. Sometimes items of personal property are buried with the body but this is neither usual nor obligatory. [268] Most personal property continues in use by other members of the household or, if not immediately needed, is abandoned and may be taken by any comer. Graves outside the house, like that described in a house, were formerly lined and roofed with sticks and mud so that dirt piled on top did not touch the body, but they did not generally protrude above the ground. This lining or roofing is still sometimes provided, but is no longer invariable. Some of the old houses with graves were burned, but this seems to have been rather a casual act or a mere accident from firing the sabanas than a ceremonial duty and certainly is not considered necessary.

765 It was formerly the custom to dig up the bones after an interval of about 178 a year, clean them, and keep them in a chest or basket, but this custom is said to have been entirely abandoned long since and we saw no evidence of it.

176 [see footnote on p. 328, category 116 – Analysis]

764 Although the body thus came to be left in the grave, no attempt was
177 made to mark or maintain the site until very recently. Now a cross is sometimes erected — there are two in the cemetery at Uruyén and one grave (a prone burial) has a light cane railing around three sides. These are evident attempts to copy burials seen in Venezuelan villages, as reported by the two or three traveled individuals who have seen them. Of course no inscriptions are
●769 used and no care is taken of the plots. There is no cult of the dead and no offerings are placed on the grave.

Notions of Time

805 The few relatively sophisticated, Spanish-speaking Indians are aware of
[177] the European calendar and system of reckoning time and will sometimes speak of months, hours, and other decidedly non-Kamarakoto concepts. It is evident, however, that even they have no definite means of telling what time it is and do not accurately know the hour or month or date. These foreign concepts are as yet quite unknown to the bulk of the tribe and of no practical use to the few who realize that they exist. The Kamarakotos have no definite time system. They recognize and designate the time of day by the height of the sun, and speak of dawn, morning, evening, early or late in the day, and so on, as we do when deprived of timepieces, but have no fixed subdivisions of the day. They reckon days for rather short intervals that are important to them, but keep no permanent or continuous record. They seem, for instance, to have no idea of how many days there are in a year and usually are quite unable to tell how many days have elapsed since an event more than a week or two in the past.

There is probably no recognized unit between the day and the year. Our interpreter spoke sometimes of months, but I could not observe that the Indians really kept any track of the phases of the moon or used them to reckon time, although I might be mistaken in this. They do, of course, recognize the year as a succession of one rainy and one dry season and within each of their two
[82] seasons they are usually well aware of relative position. For instance, they can predict rather accurately when the season is due to change and they know at about what time various fruits will ripen, flowers bloom, birds lay eggs, and so on. No continuous record of years is kept and there is almost no perception of long spans of elapsed time beyond such expressions as "when I was young," "in my father's time," "when so-and-so built his house," and so forth. No Kamarakoto has any real idea of his own age or of that of his children. Even for young children the birth of whom was still vividly in mind, statements regarding age were often manifestly absurd.

In summary, the Kamarakotos appear to be about as completely devoid of any chronological sense, system, terminology or records as rational beings can be.